

Merritt Parkway, Pumpkin Brook Culvert
Spanning Pumpkin Brook at the 35.57 mile mark
on the Merritt Parkway
Stratford
Fairfield County
Connecticut

HAER No. CT-128

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 37127
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

Merritt Parkway, Pumpkin Brook Culvert

HAER No. CT-128

Location: Spanning Pumpkin Brook at the 35.57 mile mark on the Merritt Parkway in Stratford, Fairfield County, Connecticut

UTM: 18.656970.4566760
Quad: Bridgeport, Connecticut

Construction Date: 1941

Engineer: Connecticut Highway Department

Contractor: Peter Mitchell Construction Company
Greenwich, Connecticut

Present Owner: Connecticut Department of Transportation
Wethersfield, Connecticut

Present Use: Used by traffic on the Merritt Parkway to cross Pumpkin Brook

Significance: The bridges of the Merritt Parkway were predominately inspired by the Art Deco and Art Moderne architectural styles of the 1930s. Experimental forming techniques were employed to create the ornamental characteristics of the bridges. This, combined with the philosophy of incorporating architecture into bridge design and the individuality of each structure, makes them distinctive.

Historians: Todd Thibodeau, HABS/HAER Historian
Corinne Smith, HAER Engineer
August 1992

For more detailed information on the Merritt Parkway, refer to the Merritt Parkway History Report, HAER No. CT-63.

LOCAL HISTORY

In spring 1639, sixty-five settlers came to Cupheag (now Stratford) on the west bank of the Housatonic River where it meets the Long Island Sound. This group migrated from Wethersfield, led by the Reverend Adam Blakeman.¹

As the town grew, land was bought from the surrounding Indian tribes until the community stretched twelve miles long and ten miles wide. In 1685, Stratford received its town patent from the Colonial Government of Connecticut. The community retained its original boundaries until 1789 when Huntington was granted civic independence; Trumbull separated in 1797, Bridgeport in 1821, and Monroe in 1823. The present town covers an area of nineteen-and-one-half square miles.²

Early Stratford was primarily a shipping and fishing center. The community was also the main crossing point for the Housatonic River. A ferry operated on the river from 1648 until the first bridge was built in 1795.³

The New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad reached town in 1850. The railroad failed to bring manufacturing enterprises, but did encourage the summer-vacation industry. At the same time, the buying and selling of real estate became big business in Stratford.

The railroad also helped neighboring Bridgeport develop into a manufacturing center. Even though Bridgeport developed rapidly, Stratford remained primarily a residential community. The town's population started to increase in the 1880s as industrial workers from Bridgeport moved to

¹Dorothy Euerle, "History of Stratford, 1637-1989," (Manuscript, Stratford Public Library Vertical File).

²Euerle, 2.

³"Stratford, the Unhurried Town," (Manuscript, Stratford Public Library Vertical File, 1959), 2.

Stratford, to escape the noise and pollution within that city. This migration increased after 1890, when the Bridgeport Horse Car Company introduced service to Stratford. Within five years ridership warranted extending and electrifying the line.⁴

When plans for the Merritt Parkway were first announced, Stratford residents were upset by the route, which called for the road to cut south into their downtown before linking up with the Post Road/U.S. Route 1, and crossing the Housatonic River on the Washington Bridge. They realized the congestion this would create in their community and campaigned for a second bridge spanning the Housatonic.⁵ In 1938 the state obtained federal funding to build the Housatonic River Bridge. After completion the parkway does not appear to have had a dramatic impact on Stratford. The town was already a bedroom community for Bridgeport, and too far from New York City to attract a high number of commuters.

BRIDGE CONSTRUCTION HISTORY

The Pumpkin Brook originates in Shelton helping to form Beaver Dam Lake and Trap Falls Reservoir, before emptying into the Housatonic River just south of the parkway. The Peter Mitchell Construction Company of Greenwich, CT, received the contract to grade the Merritt Parkway from Cutspring Road, in Stratford, to the Housatonic River. The contract for the Pumpkin Brook Culvert also was awarded to the Mitchell Construction Company.⁶ The culvert cost \$17,360 and was

⁴"Stratford, the Unhurried Town," 4.

⁵Helen Binney Kitchel, "Story of the Merritt," Greenwich Press, 28 April 1938, p. 15.

⁶Contract Card File, Map File and Engineering Records Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation, Wethersfield, CT.

completed in 1941. The paving work for this region of the Merritt extended from Cutspring Road to the Housatonic River. This contract was assigned to the Osborn-Barnes Construction Company of Danbury, CT (ConnDot project #180-170). The Pumpkin Brook Culvert has received little maintenance since it was built.⁷

BRIDGE DESCRIPTION

The Pumpkin Brook Culvert carries the Merritt Parkway over Pumpkin Brook. The culvert is composed of double-span, reinforced-concrete beams supported by solid abutments on each end and a solid wall in the center. The beam deepens slightly at each support. The sloping wing walls are placed at various angles to the abutments.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Euerle, Dorothy. "History of Stratford, 1637-1989." Manuscript, Stratford Public Library Vertical File, 1989.

Hurd, D. Hamilton. History of Fairfield County, Connecticut. Philadelphia: J. W. Lewis and Company, 1881.

Kitchel, Helen Binney. "Story of the Merritt." Greenwich Press. April 28, 1938, p. 15.

----- "Stratford, the Unhurried Town." Manuscript, Stratford Public Library Vertical File, 1959.

----- Contract Card File. Map File and Engineering Records Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation: Wethersfield, CT. This includes construction drawings, copies of which are in the HAER field records.

----- Bridge Maintenance File. Engineering Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation: Newington, CT.

⁷Pumpkin Brook Culvert, DOT #758; Bridge Maintenance File, Engineering Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation, Newington, CT.

PROJECT INFORMATION

This recording project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey and the Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) Division of the National Park Service, Robert J. Kapsch, Chief. The Merritt Parkway recording project was sponsored and funded by the Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDot) and the Federal Highway Administration.

The fieldwork, measured drawings, historical reports and photographs were prepared under the general direction of Eric N. DeLony, HAER Chief, and Sara Amy Leach, HABS Historian.

The recording team consisted of Jacqueline A. Salame (Columbia University), architect and field supervisor; Mary Elizabeth Clark (Pratt Institute) and B. Devon Perkins (Yale University), architectural technicians; Joanne McAllister-Hewlings (US/ICOMOS-Great Britain, University of Sheffield), landscape architect; Corinne Smith (Cornell University), engineer; Gabrielle M. Esperdy (City University of New York) and Todd Thibodeau (Arizona State University), historians; and Jet Lowe, HAER photographer.